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Not Fit For Print

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Not Fit For Print

How Safe is Your Job?

by Tony Leisner (Dawson) (71023.3440@compuserve.com)

This year I have the distinction of being the President of the Marketing of Public Library Services Section of the **Public Library Association**. I didn't win the election, but through a series of events was appointed to fill a vacancy created by Linda Mielke's election to the President-elect position of PLA. After a decade of programs devoted to the marketing of the library and its services, the executive board felt it was time for a reexamination of the goals and purpose of the section and we agreed to work as a team to find some new direction since so many libraries were adopting marketing for their institutions. We felt that, while marketing of the library was important, something was missing as information transformed the role of the library and the librarian. None of us wants to envision a world without librarians even though we could all agree that the library itself would be vastly changed.

When I received my appointment as Adjunct Associate Professor of Marketing at Northwestern University's J.L. Kellogg Graduate School of Management I soon discovered that most of my students were not going to be marketing soap suds and tires. They were going to enter the world of professional services in finance, communication, health care, education, insurance and they were going to need a whole new set of tools and methods for marketing. From this observation a new course was created with the emphasis on marketing of professional services rather than products. Professional services are the product and, most importantly, they are intangible.

In the history of libraries we have usually thought of the contents of the library as its product. It is the stuff on the shelves and in the file drawers and in the electronic archives. For centuries this was an accurate view and for many historical libraries this is still applicable, but for the future this relegates the role of the librarian to that of caretaker and that is a waste of talent, training and ability. In a craft that has made such supreme efforts to promote its professional status this would be devastating and would fail to attract the new people that are needed to replace retiring librarians. While those of us who are close to this business know that this traditional role of the librarian is a distortion, how can we reverse this perception and establish in peoples' minds that librarians have been at the vanguard of infor-

mation and technological change and that the librarian's services have much more value than has been recognized?

I believe that it is time to acknowledge that we have done a great job of establishing the value of libraries and we need to shift to marketing the librarian as a professional service provider. Doctors, lawyers, bankers, accountants and other service providers have been utilizing marketing for years now and many

with extraordinary success. In what follows, I will outline some of the fundamental truths about professional services and, if interest war-

rants, I will embellish in future columns.

Perhaps the most important concept for you to understand in marketing services is the role of expectations. Do you remember when FedEx advertised, "When you absolutely, positively have to have it"? They created an expectation and developed systems to deliver on that promise with a guarantee of money back if they didn't deliver according to expectations. The company created the expectation, managed the systems needed to deliver on the expectation, and prospered. Contrast that with some of the recent slogans created by ALA and the likelihood that your library could develop systems and people to deliver on the expectation that might be created by them. Do you remember "When you need to know, ask a librarian"? Or, "Get it at the library", whatever "it" was? How about "Your right to know"? The problem with the slogan of the year approach to enhancing the value of librarians is that each one creates some expectation and the fact that it is obscure, changing and we all know that a new one is always on the way. It is a little like truth in advertising, you must tell people what to expect and then meet that expectation exceedingly well all the time.


Systems aren't the service. But, without systems, there frequently is a disservice rather than a service. Imagine showing up at an airport, expecting to fly off into the sunset and being told you can't go today because the



computer is down. The plane is there, the crew is there, all the components you require to get out of town are operative but the system prevents the provision of the core service. Of course that sounds ridiculous and any airline worth its salt will not let the system stand in the way of delivering on its promise. In order to enhance services many organizations are substituting systems for people. Like voice mail and automated phone systems. Did I just strike a cord with you? Sure, because we have all encountered systems that prevent us from getting the service we need rather than helping to deliver it better. Systems must be designed to support service providers rather than substitute for them. The lack of systems prevents the successful delivery of services. Are things where people expect them to be or did you arrange the library to suit the librarian? Grocery stores are a model of logical and familiar arrangement. The vegetables are at the beginning and the ice cream is at the end of your visit. Most libraries are designed to retain control, security and minimize staff costs

but that makes them pretty unfriendly to customers and over time can make the local bookstore, particularly a Barnes and Noble, a formidable competitor. Your floor

plan is a system in the delivery of your services, and it is a poor use of a professionals' time to be constantly sending people to places that ought to be obvious.

There is lots more to the challenge of enhancing the value of the service provided by librarians and the resulting increased valuation of the librarian. However, these two points — expectations and systems — will get you off to a good start toward marketing your value and career. 

"Professional services are the product and, most importantly, they are intangible."

"[W]e need to shift to marketing the librarian as a professional service provider."